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ABSTRACT

An intermediate level course in a university French program, entitled "Problems in Language and Style," is intended to develop students' skills in reading, writing, and speaking French through extensive work in building vocabulary and idioms. After a thorough and methodical reading of one novel and one play, the students are expected to read most moderately difficult texts in the original version with comprehension and enjoyment. Various instructional methods are incorporated into the course, which uses learner-centered group activities and constant emphasis on communication. Because the original foreign language version of the texts are used, background information about the author, the author's relationship to the work, and the text's general scope, as well as materials and activities encouraging communication and classroom interaction are added by the teacher. Extensive vocabulary and idiom lists are distributed at the outset. Compositions related to the text's structure or content but designed to stimulate student thinking are assigned throughout the course, alternating with examinations. Classroom activities include role-playing, physical response activities, and mock telephone conversations related to the texts. Testing focuses on vocabulary, idioms, and free expression, and combines objective items with the writing of original sentences using idioms, and short compositions. Numerous specific suggestions for classroom activities in all the above-mentioned areas are included. (MSE)

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AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION APPROACH FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF FRENCH LITERATURE

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AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF FRENCH LITERATURE

I. The Course

French VI, "Problems in Language and Style" is "intended to develop students' skills in reading, writing and speaking French, ... particularly through extensive vocabulary and idiom building". (course description) Two texts, one novel and one play, are read thoroughly and methodically, after which students should be able to read most moderately difficult texts in the original version with total comprehension and enjoyment.

Students enrolled in this course have completed the equivalent of four quarters of French at the University level. French 1, 2 and 3 constitute a one-year sequence where texts such as Découverte et Création by Hester and Jian, or Langue et Langage by Pucciani and Hamel are covered. French 4 is a review grammar course using Collage (Baker and Bleuzé) four days a week and short stories from Panaché littéraire by Calvin and Baker are read one day a week. All classes are taught entirely in French using the direct method without recourse to English from day one. Some of the students are Freshmen from advanced placement classes. A sizeable group come from the International Relations major, whereas others represent diverse disciplines from both the arts and the sciences.

This course is designed to prepare students for upper division literature classes while improving their linguistic and communicative skills, and this paper will attempt to furnish a working model for the introduction of literature at the intermediate level with emphasis on a communicative cultural approach. Specific references are given to the following four of the novels studied: Le Notaire du Havre, La Porte étroite, La Symphonie pastorale and Fermina Márquez.

II. Choice of a text

I agree with Swaffar that "graded or edited texts...have been linguistically and culturally sanitized.[1] Therefore, the novel and play are read in the original. After experimenting with numerous texts, the following combinations proved most satisfactory:

1.	Gide:	La Porte étroite, and	Ionesco:	La Cantatrice chauve and La Leçon	
2.	Duhamel:	Le Notaire du Havre	and	Anouilh:	L'Alouette
3.	Larbaud:	Fermina Márquez	and	Anouilh:	Antigone
4.	Mauriac:	Thérèse Desqueyroux	and	Anouilh:	L'Alouette
5.	Gide:	La Symphonie pastorale	and	Camus:	Les Justes
6.	Robbe-Grillet:	Djinn	and	Anouilh:	Antigone
7.	Flaubert:	Trois Contes	and	Anouilh:	Beckett

III. Overall Methodology

An attempt has been made in this class to use an eclectic approach using various methods incorporating humanistic learner-centered group activities with constant emphasis on communication. All classroom activities should encourage affective activities which reflect the students' values, opinions, and feelings based on their personal experience. The direct method is not a single approach but a collection of techniques--audio-lingual, audio-visual, inductive, deductive, etc.--which require careful planning and execution. It is possible to borrow ideas from Asher's "Total Physical Response," Terrell's "Natural Approach," Galyan's "Confluent Methodology," etc. However, students are too far advanced to profit from Gattagno's "Silent Way," and I strongly disagree with Terrell that "students should be allowed to respond in either the target language or a mixture of the two."[2] The class must be conducted entirely in French.

Specific Suggestions

A. Reading

Since all texts are read in their original form, the instructor is required to add materials and activities to encourage communication and student inter-action. The only authentic French novel adapted to this approach is Le Rendez-vous (Robbe-Grillet's Djinn), with notes and activities by Yvonne Lenard. Teachers pressed for time might want to utilize this edition.

Before "diving" into the novel, it is essential to furnish sufficient background information regarding the author, his relationship to his work, and the general scope of his text. This also established a rapport between the instructor and his class and gets students acquainted with a new instructor's French and method of presentation.

Students are asked to read the assigned portions of the text at least twice before coming to class, at first scanning, then more carefully. All books should remain closed during class activities to encourage spontaneity. The classroom discussion should start with an overall view of the material read, general comprehension of events, and lead to specific interpretations via the means of language and vocabulary analysis. It is always essential to relate the text to the students' personal experiences in order to transform their reading, which is usually passive, into an active communicative expression of meaning and interpretation.

IV. Specific Suggestions

B. Vocabulary

On the first day, students receive a vocabulary list, entirely in French, which is divided into two parts: vocabulary per se and difficult idiomatic

expressions. I have several copies which I shall gladly share with anyone interested. Students are asked to create original sentences with the expressions, which are written on the board once a week and discussed and corrected by the entire class. Usually, one or more of the students act as professor, and some grammar is reviewed as needed. Translation of the vocabulary into English is discouraged except for technical terms, since students often decipher inaccurate lexical meanings. A French-French dictionary is preferred. Amusing misunderstandings often occur. An expression like "lâcher pied" might be interpreted as losing a foot -- making students think of an accident instead of the psychological retreat the author had intended. "Faire un somme," with the meaning of taking a nap, was interpreted as balancing the weekly budget, and "elle est morte en couches"as she died on the couch.

Since the list of words is very long, students have great apprehension. I stress that the list is MY list since I wrote it, and that each of them will approach this list with different previous knowledge. Guessing from context is encouraged, and aids are given such as those proposed by Keller and Gruzs, [3] using root - pre and suffixes, etymological cognates, mnemonic systems. etc. Keywords are often used to initiate the discussion, such as "le clan, la tribu, la nichée," (Notaire)"or "ses rivaux" in Fermina. The exact meaning of the word or expression is analyzed in context, going from "sens propre" to "sens figuré", symbolic values, author's intent, stylistics, etc.

Articles in Science state that language includes "intuition, insight and inspiration," much of which is found at a "deep, perhaps unconscious level" and that its origins "remain obscured in our evolutionary past." [4] Therefore, complete student involvement drawing on past experiences is encouraged. Examples are selected from each chapter and discussed in detail from a specific point of view leading towards a psychological, sociological, or even global approach. For example:

a. Duhamel: Le Notaire du Havre: Chapter 3. "Les hauts flancs aveugles". Starting with a linguistic and descriptive analysis of the meanings of "flancs" and "aveugles" to an interpretation of walls without windows, to a further interpretation of "haut" as seen through the eyes of a child, with a final interpretation of the social milieu, life in a city, poverty and its problems, city vs. country life, etc.

b. Gide: La Porte étroite: Chapter 5. "Teissières me paraît bien le papillon qu'il faut pour s'y brûler." Starting with an analysis of the language, choice of the words "papillon" and "brûler" to express subconscious feelings of envy or resentment, to conclude with a continuing discussion of personal interactions, choice of the correct mate, etc.

c. Gide: La Symphonie pastorale, 10 mars. "Deux êtres qui s'aiment peuvent rester ... emmurés." Again a discussion based on linguistics, the choice of words "êtres" instead of "personnes", and "emmurés" which could

lead to an analysis of alienation and isolation with reference to students' personal experiences, problems, and possible solutions.

d. Larbaud: Fermina Márquez is an excellent source for vocabulary analysis and class discussion, leading to more universal concepts, since it deals with the problems of teenagers in a school setting. For example, the sadistic Demoisel, "négligé de la nature", handsome Santos "viril, plein d'une insolence gaie", Joanny, ambitious, antisocial "personne ne l'aimait" and the relationship of "les chevaliers" to Fermina and her little sister are bound to evoke personal experiences. The problems of popularity, belonging to or jealousy of an in-group, have no doubt been encountered by everyone and students are able to relate and sympathize with Camille's "grands déséspoirs d'enfant".

A quote such as "Le cadeau, c'était le paiement d'un service rendu," leads to an analysis of the paradox between "cadeau" and payment for service rendered, leading to a discussion of social castes and Joanny's feelings of insecurity and resentment at being treated as a servant. This might encourage a redefinition of "democracy" and "freedom". Discussions are held by the entire class or in smaller groups of 3 - 5 students.

C. Writing

Even though the communicative approach is emphasized, creative writing is encouraged and essential in order to prepare students for upper division classes. Compositions alternate with exams on a weekly basis and relate to the novel. Using the texts under consideration, compositions might be assigned as follows:

Composition I	Grammar:	Review of past tenses
Humanistic value:		To furnish insight into the students background, problems and attitudes--getting to know them.
Literary:		Encourage empathy towards the characters and setting of the novel.
Sample Topics:		
Notaire:		Introduce your family. Use the scene of the arrival of the letter from the notaire as model.
Symphonie pastorale:		A trip with one's family--introducing each member.
Porte étroite:		A childhood memory
Fermina Márquez:		Your first childhood friend or unhappy/happy memories of high school.
Composition II	Grammar:	Review of the present tense and practice in descriptive writing.

Comp. II (Contd)

Humanistic value: To gain deeper insight into the students, their feelings and opinions.

Literary: The importance of style and sensitivity to the "mot juste".

Sample Topics:

Notaire: Describe a house or other place as per Duhamel's description of the tenement, using all five senses.

Symphonie pastorale: Describe a walk in the country relating to your senses.

Porte étroite and Fermina Márquez: A description of a friendship with examples from personal experience.

Composition III Grammar: Review of the subjunctive, conditional, etc. depending on the needs of the class.

Humanistic value: The communication and expression of ideas with reference to cultural, social, and anthropological aspects of the text.

Literary: Practice in using the correct tense to express feelings or emotions.

Sample Topics:

Notaire: If I were poor and living in the slums of Paris. If I were Laurent, Desirée, or any of the characters in the text.

Symphonie pastorale: If I were blind, deaf, crippled, etc.

Porte étroite: Pages from the diaries of Jerome, Juliette, or the student's own diary.

Fermina Márquez: If I were attending a school in a foreign country. unpopular, a minority, etc.

Composition IV Grammar: After the completion of the novel. To display critical thinking and analysis of the text.

Humanistic value: To relate the novel read to students' other interests and convey a feeling of accomplishment in having read and understood an entire novel in French.

Comp. IV (Contd)

Literary:	To introduce students to various critical approaches.
Sample Topic:	A "critique" of the text with specific references based on one or more of the following criteria: a. stylistics b. biographical (relating to author) c. cultural d. psychological e. sociological f. historical. One science student wrote an excellent "physiological" critique.

Composition V. Frequently, a fifth composition is assigned after the completion of both works. The topics call for a treatment of a universal theme, encourage student opinion, and require specific reference to the material read. For example:

The value of self-sacrifice or The changing rôle of women	(Notaire and L'Alouette)
The individual in society	(Thérèse and L'Alouette)
Religion vs. Atheism Dominant and submissive personalities	(Symphonie and Les Justes)

Another approach might be to have students identify with one of the characters and write their compositions in the form of a journal, varying tenses and meaning throughout the quarter.

SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS:

D. Communication

1. Simulation and Rôle Playing

In order to encourage communication along the lines of humanistic-affective activities, students usually participate in an event. The technique of "brainstorming" can be used to elicit ideas and opinions. Manzo's Request Procedure [5] wherein students and instructor alternate in questioning and guessing further outcomes is an effective technique. A cultural situation is actually "faked" to impart the semblance of realism. Often, students even go beyond the intent of the author, and appropriate the text for themselves.

Examples:

1. Le Notaire du Havre

1. Students or the instructor bring lentil soup and sit around the "dinner table" in groups of six, each student representing one member of the

family. Discussion of various topics--Papa's "colère majuscule"--and inclusion of idiomatic expressions such as "avoir de l'oeil," while slurping the "soupe à la Solange."

2. Laurent and Desirée sit on the edge of the desk, pretending it to be the edge of the Paris rooftops. Various discussions. Views of Paris. Comparisons of their relationship to their respective fathers.

3. A simulated classroom. M Joliclerc drones on--student reaction.

4. Joseph, "un fruit sec" refuses to study. Discussion of the importance of education, diverse viewpoints.

5. The various boarders and their confrontations with the family.

6. Le ménage Courtois--one student acts deaf or senile--rôle reversals.

La Symphonie pastorale:

1. The pastor arrives at the farm and finds Gertrude.

2. Conversations with the doctor--prognosis for Gertrude's blindness.

3. Confrontations between the pastor and his jealous wife.

4. Confrontations between father and son.

La Porte étroite.

1. Alissa's mother and her soldier friend.

2. Juliette tells about her honeymoon travels, or talks to her children about her childhood.

3. Abel defends his racy novel.

4. Juliette's "crise" and the reaction of various family members.

5. Alissa arrives at the sanatorium.

Fermina Márquez

1. Arrival at school of Fermina and her sister with their aunt.

2. Santos takes Fermina's bracelet -- ensuing conversation.

3. A classroom rebellion against M Lebrun.

4. Santos' escapades in Paris -- imaginative encounters.

5. Various students discuss religion or their opinion of the ideal woman.

6. Distribution of prizes.

2. Physical Response:

Asher's method is intended for introductory language classes. However, it can be used effectively at this level to drill and reinforce vocabulary and encourage class interaction. A list of ca. 20 physical response activities, taken from the text, are handed out for each chapter. Students act these out as a group, in pairs, or they can be used most effectively as warm-up exercises at the beginning of the period to set students at ease. A few examples follow: (Please see me for complete lists)

Le Notaire du Havre:

1. se donner des coups de poing sur le dos de la main gauche.
2. se ronger les ongles.
3. sucer un bout de crayon.
4. pincer la joue de quelqu'un.

La Symphonie pastorale:

1. se tenir immobile au pied du lit.
2. geindre et grogner comme un animal.
3. faire une moue charmante.
4. guider ses doigts sur les touches.

La Porte étroite:

1. replier le petit doigt mièvrement.
2. toucher sa lèvre, cueillir un peu de salive et s'en mouiller le coin des yeux.
3. s'agenouiller, le corps secoué de sanglots.
4. se glisser le long du mur.

Fermina Márquez:

1. fixer les yeux sur quelqu'un.
2. tordre le poignet.
3. baiser la manche de la raquette.
4. dormir accoudé à la table.

3. The Use of Two Telephones -
This method is especially appealing to students who forget their self-consciousness when they pretend to be speaking through a receiver. Toy telephones are used and given to two students who are asked to create a conversation. They thus transpose the text into the 20th century and add their personal interpretation, insight, and often a great sense of humor.

Examples:

I. Notaire du Havre:

1. Cleiss, the boss, calls Papa.
2. The Notaire calls Maman.
3. M Joliclerc calls from the school.
4. A salesman from Incanda-Finska calls to sell stock.
5. A call to the landlord protesting the family's eviction.

II. Symphonie pastorale:

1. Conversations between Gertrude, Jacques, the pastor, etc., at different occasions.
2. Jacques calls his father, confessing his love for Gertrude.
3. The pastor calls his wife--true confessions or excuses.
4. Gertrude calls from the hospital--she has regained sight.
5. Gertrude's final goodbye to Jacques

III. La Porte étroite:

1. Jerome and Alissa--conversations at different times--instead of the journal.
2. Juliette and Alissa discuss Jerome.
3. Abel talks to his publisher.
4. Jerome and Juliette call from various countries they are visiting.
5. Alissa calls to say goodbye from the hospital.

IV. Fermina Márquez:

1. Mama Doloré calls the headmaster to enroll her nephew.
2. Santos calls Fermina to arrange a "rendez-vous".
3. Joanny calls his parents to brag about his scholastic achievements.
4. Camille calls home--he is homesick and wants to leave school.
5. Joanny calls Mama Doloré to sever his relationship with Fermina.

E. Testing

Exams must be carefully structured to test the aims of this class, namely extensive vocabulary, idiom building and free expression. I analyze the texts methodically and divide the content into various categories in order to construct a variety of test questions. Usually 50 percent is objective; the correct comprehension of ca. 50 words is checked, using one or more of the following methods: Sentence completion, equivalent vocabulary, definitions from vocabulary or vocabulary from a definition, four words in the same category--with one exception where students are asked to identify the subject, synonyms, antonyms, related words from the same root, matching expressions, etc. (see examples in the handout).

Another 25 percent involves the writing of original sentences from a list of idioms. The results can be used to review common errors of grammar. The last 25-30 percent entails the writing of one or two short compositions where students can use their imagination or critical thinking, identify with the characters, or elaborate on global concepts or universal values relating to the text.

CONCLUSION

The novel is completed during the first 8 or 9 weeks of the 10-week quarter and the play is read last as "dessert". By then, students are completely at ease, able to communicate freely and enjoy the actual process of playreading.

Students gain an insight and appreciation for different social, cultural, economic, or physical milieux which permits creative students to use their imagination in order to communicate in a meaningful manner with increased vocabulary and enjoyment. They can utilize newly acquired tools for self-expression. In addition, as Rivers has stated, "the reading skill, once developed, is the one which can be most easily maintained at a high level by the students themselves without further help from a teacher. [6]

NOTES

[1] Janet K. Swaffar. "Reading Authentic Texts in a Foreign Language: a Cognitive Model." Modern Language Journal, 69, No. 1 (Spring 1985), 15.

[2] Tracy Terrell. "The Natural Approach to Language Teaching: An Update." Modern Language Journal, 66 (1982), 121-131.

[3] Howard H. Keller. "New Perspectives on Teaching Vocabulary." ERIC, Languages in Education Series, 1978; Melissa M. Gruzs, and Elaine McKee. "Mnemonic Devices: Pegs on which to Hang your Students' Memory." AATF National Bulletin, II, No. 3 (Jan. 1986), 8-11.

[4] Mitchell Waldrop. "Machinations of thought." Science, March 1985, pp. 38-45; Ann Finkbeiner. "How did language begin?" Science, Dec. 1984, pp. 24-26.

[5] A. Manzo. "The request procedure." Journal of Reading, 13, 123-126.

[6] Wilga M. Rivers. Teaching Foreign Language Skills (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1981); Claire Kramsch. "Literary Texts in the Classroom: A discourse." Modern Language Journal, 96, No. 4 (Winter 1985).